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THE USE OF THE MODERN INTERPRETATION OF THE
GOSPELS IN THE CHURCH SCHOOL OF TODAY

by

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THE USE OF THE MODERN INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPELS IN THE CHURCH SCHOOL OF TO-DAY.

Part I, The Introduction.

There are many problems that come to light when one enters the field of Religious Education for professional service. It seems that the problems of the educator in the field of religion are so unique, especially so because of the newness of Religious Education in the work of the Christian Church. One must meet not only the difficulties of public education, but must also meet the difficulties that come in teaching religion. They are just as pronounced and as numerous. The Holy Bible has for years, even for centuries, been the heart of all teaching in Christian Education. Some changes have been made necessary of course as newer and better methods of instruction have been discovered, and as Christian men and women have received the Holy Bible as a book to be used in their own hands.

The Holy Bible, placed in the hands of Christians for their personal use, has literally transformed western civilization. But more has come out of its use than a transformation of civilization. The Bible itself has been undergoing a transformation during the past four centuries, and educators in Christian Religion are

invited here to make recognition of some of the more recent transformations of the Bible, and further, to make use of them in the work of the church school of the present time. Scholars in Biblical research have been able to produce certain corrections and affirmations, and thereby have made the contribution of a more valuable text for Christian Education. The educator must now acquaint himself with the results of modern research, and use whatever he can in his own teaching, to give the pupils in our church schools the advantage and full benefit of the fruits of the scholarship of the times. This will require a thorough reflection upon the subject matter as it has been taught in the past, together with an examination as to what is the subject matter as it is now known. With the motivation of having only the fruit of modern research at the heart of all curricula materials, an entirely new organization of the present curricula is necessary in the work of the church school of to-day.

The whole of this problem that is before the minds of Christian educators may be best stated in the words of a prominent leader in religious education as follows: "How shall religious education deal with the changed views of the Bible that result from

modern scholarship?"* This is no small subject, and to answer the whole of the question requires more study and thought than can be devoted to it in this presentation. However, a part of the problem will be thought through in the investigation of this paper; namely, "How shall religious education deal with the changed views of the Gospels?"** The Gospels represent only a part of the whole Bible, but they do include such a part as has proved to be of importance in Christian Education. They contain the story of the life and teachings of Jesus. After all, it is this gospel-story that stands at the center of all Christian Education, and regardless of whatever way the story is used, it ought to be presented with every possible degree of accuracy and certainty that scholarship can apply to its presentation.

Out of the above questions there come additional questions of more specific nature, and they are the more intricate because of the accompanying implications. The adult who desires to know any part of the Scriptures from the modern point of view finds a considerable

*George A. Coe, in Youth and the Bible, by Muriel Anne Streibert, p.XI.

** Suggested by Professor Coe, Ibid.

number of popular expositions written to meet this particular need. But amazingly little has been printed that squarely meets the whole issue as it affects the teaching of children, and very little of what has been published was ever meant for use in the hands of children. The question immediately arises as to whether one should let the children know what scholars really think about the various parts of the Bible. If so, how should this knowledge be imparted to them, through the printed page, through the pulpit, or through the teacher? Further questioning must be confronted in the handling of the miracle stories, particularly the stories of the birth and of the resurrection of Jesus which are so puzzling to the minds of children who are just passing from a life of fancy and imagination to a life of facts and cold reality. The miracle stories do not fit entirely in the scheme of the latter. Christian Education cannot avoid facing these questions, and it must do everything possible to guide the children safely through to a complete understanding of the gospel-story as it is revealed in the four Gospels.

The intricate nature of the problem may be best illustrated in an incident in a certain church school where a young high school boy was known to argue the possibility of Nazareth as having been the birth-place of the Christ-child, instead of at Bethlehem which has always been accepted rather definitely as the birth-place by church school teaching circles. His information was acquired in a rather indirect way through a summer young people's conference, and whereas the bit of information did not necessarily disturb him, the incident brings to an issue the question as to just what is being brought to the children to-day, as over against what has been given them throughout the past. Upon closer examination it may be discovered that there has been some faulty teaching somewhere in the school, or that the teaching may not have been the same as to interpretation of certain parts of the Scriptures. The finished products of of some church schools hint at instances of faulty teaching that may be at fault because it is inadequate, or is of another day, or at least, is not conveying a fully informed content. Examine the amount and the nature of instruction in the field of the Gospels, that is, in the life and teachings of Jesus, in any church school that one may choose, and the inferior quality of

teaching and the inadequate quantity of the subject matter will be readily noticeable.

The attempt in the past to cover all parts of the Bible in the curricula of the church school has been a tremendous burden, not alone from the standpoint of the limited amount of given time to teach the Bible, but more because of what the Bible itself contains. It contains the history of a people, and the history of the attempt of that people to find and follow God. All of this is valuable if placed in the curricula, but in most instances it only replaces and so often crowds out of the program ample space to make an adequate study of the gospel story. Religious education is further involved in an act that may not be considered entirely as Christian Education, when it places so much emphasis upon meeting the needs of the child in his present situation. Formerly the objective of the church school was to teach the Bible.* In more recent times it has been to train children in religious experiences.** The general emphasis of this presentation is toward the more extensive use of the Gospels in order to fully reveal the life and teachings of Jesus. This involves not only the extended use of the Gospels, but also the motivation secured through having Jesus as an ideal.

* As for example in the Uniform Lesson Series.

** Paul H. Vieth, Objectives in Religious Education.

In teaching the story in the Gospels, this presentation raises the question as to whether the story has been correctly taught during the past, using the term 'correctly' in the light of the contribution of modern scholarship to the general knowledge of the Gospels. The publication of a few books of a certain type* during the first part of the present century may have been misleading in numerous respects, but there can be no doubting of the fact that they did set New Testament scholars of the succeeding years to thinking to produce what seems more nearly the case of the actual gospel-story. The thought of these scholars, however, has not yet penetrated the life of the majority of the church schools of to-day. Too many schools are still burdened with the fruits of the scholarship of another day, and even though the curricula which they use may be built around a completely new set of objectives, those who are engaged to do the teaching are still of another training who do not yet know of all the more recent interpretations of the gospel-stories. Part of the problem then revolves about the matter of objectives for the church school. If the objective is to teach the

* Three examples of these are Myth, Magic, and Morals, by Fred. Cornwallis Conybeare, The Christ Myth, by A.C.H.Drews, and Was Christ Born at Bethlehem, by W.M.Ramsay. There are of course others also.

Bible, then do so with every possible degree of correctness in interpretation. If it is to train children in religious experience, then use the Bible, or whatever part of it that may be involved, with every measure of fairness as to its interpretation. Above all, if the program is to be Christ-centered, and present-day curriculum builders are indicating such a program,* it must have an adequate picture of Christ that is as nearly complete as it is possible to obtain, yet show Jesus as real, alive, and a working, struggling, sacrificing man, who was as historical as any other man can be made to be by proving him through history other than the history that is in the Bible.

The methods that are being used in the public schools to-day in their plan of teaching have the tendency to foster an element of individual research on the part of every child. This is especially true in the instances of wide-awake children who are eager to learn. The results of such methods awaken the desire in such children to discover things for themselves. This is what children and youth of to-day are doing. The practice of the schools is to allow every possible bit of freedom to learn, with the result that there is but little degree of limitation in their discovery for self. Children

* According to the latest material which is now being published by the David C. Cook Publishing Co.

and youth are eagerly following their teachers every step of the way, even to the limit of their instruction. But with them the learning process does not cease at this point. They have been trained in self-direction, and because of their training they continue until they have obtained all the facts in the situation. This urgent pressure forth is often thought of as their quest for truth, for not only do they go after the whole of the situation, but they demand the truth as well.

In the face of the fact that youth are making discoveries for themselves, there will be considerable difficulty when they discover that there is a difference between what they were taught once upon a time and what they are now finding is the true position of modern scholars. They will make the discovery that part of the story has been withheld from them, and more dangerous than that, they will see that some of the truth of modern thought does not correspond favorably with what was earlier taught them as truth. They have been taught wrong ideas. They have been led astray by faulty conceptions, and in frequent instances they have been trained under the influence of pre-established prejudices on the part of their teachers. It is true, however,

that the teaching of misconceptions was not done intentionally on the part of the leaders. But every possible effort should be made toward the correction of the faults in religious instruction, especially if the faults pertain to the subject matter. Otherwise, children and youth will be subject to the grave danger of giving up hope of discovering any measure of certainty in Christianity. On the other hand, the situation may also serve to inspire them further to obtain the whole of the truth, to proceed in their study without the limitation of a confused subject matter handed to them by their leaders, and to get the complete picture of things as they once were and as scholars now believe them to be. This will involve the sharing with them of the benefit of present day research, and will in addition serve to stimulate them to continue their search for truth along the line of scientific procedure.

One can see little reason for teaching a faulty conception of Jesus Christ. There is no reason for teaching a faulty conception of anything. Then there is no other course for Religious Education in its program of Christian training than to give the presentation of a Christ who compares favorably with the findings of the most modern of modern interpretations.

Part II, THE MODERN INTERPRETATIONS.

After all, what is the modern interpretation of the Gospels? Many have had the feeling that "scholars may do what they like with the Old Testament if they will leave the New Testament alone."* It is true that very much research has been done in the field of the Old Testament. The result is that people now have a somewhat different idea of God. Ever since the Bible was first placed in the hands of the masses something was felt to be amiss in the Old Testament, especially with regard to the creation story, the geneologies, the arithmetical computations, and the differing pictures of God. But when scholars were once able to place the Old Testament in its proper perspective to the present, through an extended knowledge of the past, the Old Testament was received anew with fresh values, even for to-day.

It is no more than natural that people should wish to have the New Testament left alone, since most that is vital in religion for them centers in it. "The New Testament goes to the very heart of Christianity and when anything as precious as that has once been associated with a certain set of ideas, most of us want those ideas left just as they are, lest a change should mean loss."**

* Streibert, Muriel Anne, Youth and the Bible, p.124.

** Ibid.

This represents one of the difficulties in Biblical scholarship that certainly appears when it comes to the study of the Gospels. It is suggestive of a quite conservative position, but it is on a firm basis when the argument continues, "If it is right to use historical methods in the Old Testament, the same methods must hold in the study of the New Testament."* A part of the responsibility of the teacher of Christianity is to study afresh the records of that matchless life by the best methods that this age has to offer. Otherwise there will be thrust into the hands of youth a faded 'tintype' of the Master, and they will be left at sea in their religious thinking because they have been trained in categories which they can no longer believe — miracles, demons, eternal hell, and conceptions on ethics which are incongruous to both the Old Testament conception of ethics and the system of morals to-day.**

The new approach to the Gospels made by modern interpretations restores much of the whole of the Gospel story. It gives a comprehensive, inclusive view of Jesus that enables one to see him not piecemeal, but through a complete picture. Each of the four Gospels when taken alone stands as a very limited account of the story, and no adequate study of Christ can be made

* Streibert, Muriel Anne, Op. cit., p.124.

** Fosdick, H.E., Modern Use of the Bible, p.5.

on the basis of any one of them. But it is necessary to gather the complete story from the Gospels, together with what other sources are available to shed additional light on the Gospels. This requires the use of procedures which are not entirely common to those used in the past to study the life of Christ.

The message of the Gospels which modern interpretations has to contribute requires in the first place the re-study of those four books in the Bible. One cannot help but think of the book, The Four Gospels,* by Burnett Hillman Streeter, in which the author has given the fruits of his study on the origins of the four Gospels. He treats at length on the manuscript tradition, and traces many influences and acts that served in the origin of the present material. He also touches upon the matter of authorship, and gives the dates of writing. The study of this book reveals the abundance of evidence that has been accumulated in the more recent past to extend our knowledge of the Gospels. It shows by itself the coördination of the results achieved in various branches of research, such as textual criticism, source-analysis, the cultural background of the early Church, and the field of mysticism. Research has succeeded in breaking up the various parts

* Macmillan Co., 1925.

of the Gospels so that each part may be examined to determine its origin as well as its contribution to the gospel-story. When the story has been isolated into small segments it is possible to get to its background to see just what influences and beliefs caused it to become attached to the story, and to see what part it plays in the development of the story. This may be better illustrated by a glance at the contribution of historic philology to the study of the New Testament, which is best obtained in the volume, Light from the Ancient East,* by Adolf Deissmann. One discovers with the author that "The Synoptic Gospels, themselves based on earlier little books, exhibit the local color of the Galilean and Palestinian countryside....St. Luke dedicates his book to a man of polish, but this does not make it polite literature." (p.248) The argument of Professor Deissmann indicates a difference between the language which was in official use by the Greek government, and the language of the New Testament. What is commonly known as New Testament Greek is in reality the language of the people of that time, the colloquial language. It was used by all in their speaking and writing. But the more classic Greek comes from a stylish group who were greatly interested

* Doran Co., 1927.

in the accuracy of their language. In the study of the Gospels it is helpful to know that this was the language of the masses of the time. It serves to guide one in the understanding of Jesus and his people, to show that he and his followers were of the common masses. The studies in philology are based on the simple texts on stone, papyrus, and on earthenware as these materials have been unearthed and once more brought to light in the world of the present. The texts have "helped us to a knowledge of the Sacred Volume on its linguistic side, and then, by that means, to no small understanding of its most distinguishing characteristics. A new ray of light falls on its history among the nations. The New Testament has become the book of the Peoples because it began by being the Book of the People."* Philology leads one to believe further that the reported sayings of Jesus are from a non-literary Jesus, and that "Christianity in its earliest creative period was most closely bound up with the lower classes and had as yet no effective connexion with the small upper classes possessed of power and culture. Jesus is found to be more in company with the small peasants and townsmen of a rural civilization."**

* A. Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, p. 144.

** Ibid., p. 246.

Professor Burton Scott Easton has stated that "the bulk of the Synoptic tradition relates events that are genuinely historic."* A few minutes later he contends that "the multiplication of sources increases the authentication of the events related" in commenting upon the source analysis made by Professor Streeter.** But one cannot say that the present-day attitude toward the Gospels, even toward the Synoptic Gospels, would wholly accept them as historical sources. Source material must come from somewhere near the original facts in the case, whereas the Synoptics are secondary and even tertiary material. The results of research along the line of the Synoptic problem have the tendency to be-little the acceptance of the entire gospel-story, notwithstanding the multiplication of sources that tell the story. Because of its very nature the Gospel of John cannot be taken as an historical document. Its contribution to the understanding of Jesus will be found in another field.

Professor Easton registers a note of warning in textual criticism that takes on the cloak of form-criticism. Form-criticism involves the examination of a particular story to determine its relation to the life of the community that framed it, and includes the dissection of the Gospels

* In his lecture, "The Gospel Before the Gospels," p.24-6.

** In Parts I and II of his volume.

into segments, with a possible classification of them, so that the Gospels may be viewed in their component parts. The danger lies in allowing form-criticism to take the place of historical criticism, whereas in reality it only prepares the way for the latter. In another lecture* he indicates one important contribution of historical criticism that must be remembered in studying the Gospels. The primary historic value of the Synoptists is not for their own age but for the tradition of the teachings of Jesus. Where it is possible to distinguish with certainty the beliefs of the Synoptic period from the teachings of Jesus, one will find the former most scantily supported by sayings placed in his mouth, while the latter are more nearly represented in his sayings.

Such, then, are some of the results of the re-examination of the text of the Gospels according to the new approach made during the past decade or so of years. No end of revelations are being made continually. Where the Gospels by themselves were once thought of as being limited for study, through the desire for more information other sources have been consulted to add unending color and understanding to the message they contain. Another of these sources is the study of

* "The Synoptic Perspective," Op.cit., pp.85-109.

history, including the history of religions contemporary to the time of Jesus. It is indeed encouraging to one who has inclinations toward agnosticism when he is led to discover a historian like Josephus making mention of activities and characters that have parallels in the gospel-story. The Gospels become more truly historical for him when he sees Christianity in history as one religion among others of the time but peculiar in itself because of the unique personality in its heart. Finally, when he discovers from his studies in Greek philosophy that the Fourth Gospel was written in much the same language as that of philosophy, to a people similar to those philosophers, he finds new value in the whole story of Jesus as seen in all of the Gospels. While Greek philosophy does give some of the history of that day, it gives more thought concerning the religion of New Testament times. Greek religious history then is extremely helpful in such passages of the Gospels that have a strong savor of mysticism, and it is only when the student has turned philosopher for a while that the Gospels reveal their deeper meanings.

The history of the times of Jesus that has to do with the customs and culture of those people is definitely amplified by what research in the field of archaeology can contribute. One has only to leaf through Professor Deissmann's Light from the Ancient East to see this fact. The potsherds, the scraps of papyrus, and the broken stones of monuments all carry messages from which may be gathered a knowledge of those people that must have some bearing upon what they believed and did, providing one is able to read the inscriptions. They not only give an insight to their religious life and thought, but in more frequent instances they illustrate in their actual messages just how their business was conducted, and to what extent they maintained intercourse in trade. The most frequent discovery of tombs with their contents tell stories of culture as well as custom in the broken fragments that are typical of the domestic materials of those peoples. The fact that such fragments are actual remnants of those ancient times makes the scene only the more impressive. The great contribution that archaeology makes in the study of the Gospels lies in its reconstruction of the scenes where Jesus lived and taught, and in its explanation of the daily practices of his fellow countrymen. There may be many limitations

in the constructive story of the four Gospels, but there certainly are few limitations to the study of the times of Jesus through the channels of history, philosophy, and archaeology. The ancient solution for interpreting the difficult passages was to treat them as allegory, and to read out their hidden meaning. No longer is this necessary. "A man must be able to recognize the abiding messages of the Book, and sometimes he must recognize them in a transient setting."*

The use of modern interpretations requires one to look at the Gospels in the light of the times of Jesus. This includes the study of the history of religions, of government, of society, and of economics in that part of the Roman world that is involved in the Gospels. In other words, the Gospels and their story must be thought of in terms of the civilization of those people, and to do this, every known account, every bit of information, and every particle of material must be included in the study to keep the study up to the present standards of scientific research.

* H.E.Fosdick, Modern Use of the Bible, p.95.

The changed views that have been wrought by scholarship in its newer approach to the study of the Gospels are not to be found alone in the different kind of procedure in study that is now being followed, nor in the related subjects that must be touched upon to get the complete picture of the Gospel story. For the consideration of this paper the changed views have more to do with the message of the Gospels, their message to students of a mechanistic age who are surrounded everywhere by things scientific. The message in the Gospels must be brought up-to-date in its content as well as in the procedure used to find its content. May it be understood that no young person or adult who is versed in the laws of science will readily present himself as a follower of Christ when he sees so much in the Gospel accounts that does not fit the pattern of his knowledge of science. His mind is trained to examine each particle of evidence for its worth, and by putting all the worthy evidence together he comes to a conclusion on the matter as a whole. Christianity has progressed so long by submitting its conclusion with so little display of the evidence that it can hardly come to see the possibility of a change in its presentation. Scientific method demands the evidence, and with that as a beginning

for youth in their use of the story of Christ, the message must be traced to each particle of evidence.

The thought is guided at this point by the words of an eminent scholar of the newer approach where he says, "A critical study of the historical Jesus, in accordance with scientific historic method, tends to a revision in some respects of the conventional conception of him and his mission. It may result for instance, in the questioning of such beliefs as the virgin birth, the happenings of a magical character ascribed to him, the bodily resurrection, the metaphysical, in contrast to the historical conception of him."* The miraculous in the Gospels suffers a great blow under the pressure of scientific historic method which is followed in the present system of educational approach. But in view of the fact that scholars in the New Testament research have been at work and have succeeded in displacing and re-arranging many conceptions of the past on these particles of evidence from within the Gospels, there is no reason for the church school to retard its pace and withhold such changed conceptions. The attempt will be made in the brief paragraphs here to set forth the different kind of thought that must be put forth in the teaching program of the Church as it reaches out to youth.

* J. Mackinnon, The Historic Jesus, p. XVI.

The opening chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke seem to indicate something supernatural connected with the birth of Jesus. This may be thought of as the problem of the Virgin Birth which stands in the way of so many in their understanding of Jesus. Both accounts profess to reveal the mystery of his generation, which is communicated to the parties concerned in a supernatural manner. But a glance through any harmony of the Gospels will reveal at once that there is very little parallelism between any of the Gospels in accounting for the generation of Jesus. The fact is that there is more confusion and mixture than there is a parallel nature. Matthew indicates the annunciation as having been made to Joseph, while Luke shows it as being made to Mary. Luke is the source for all the other information on the problem, except that of the silence of Mark and John, and if it may be included here, of The Acts. The fact of the accuracy of Luke as an historian weighs heavily to substantiate the story. But the silence of the other writers causes one to re-consider the evidence. The objection to belief in the story rests largely in the silence of St. Paul to the idea. He was apparently unaware of it.* Add to this

* R.H.Malden, Problems of the New Testament To-day, p.258.

the fact that "nowhere in the New Testament is Mary the mother of Jesus regarded as divine in any sense,"* and one will have the verification for the greatest weakness in the idea of a supernatural birth, that it necessitates the additional belief in the immaculate conception of Mary to waylay her sinfulness too.** "In the light of the evidence, direct and indirect, it is, therefore, hazardous categorically to assert this miracle on the ground of the stories relative to it,"# and one may be assured that "the greatness of Jesus rests on the reality of his moral personality and his supreme religious significance as the highest manifestation of the divine in the human; not on the problematic miracle of his birth, which there are strong historical reasons for questioning."## The real difficulty is with regard to the part of Joseph as he is revealed in the Gospels. He is not even named in the Gospel of Mark, and is mentioned just fourteen times in all, and only then by Matthew and Luke.%

The story of the shepherds is more incidental than it is contributory to the story of Jesus. In the Lucan narrative the Bethlehemite shepherds merely visit the stable of the inn to see the young child, and at most,

* T.J.Thorburn, The Mythical Interpretation of the Gospels, pp.15-6.

** J.Mackinnon, Op.cit., p.13.

Ibid., p.11. ## Ibid., p.16.

% T.J.Thorburn, Op.cit., pp.22-3.

to attest the fact of his birth. But the concern of the shepherds is at all not vital, for "in ancient civilizations of the pastoral types it is only probable that they would be involved in many events connected with the lives and acts of the more important individuals of their respective countries."*

The wise-men and their gifts create a puzzle to some extent, but the account of them comes from the Jewish Matthew whose imagination must have gloried in the thought that now the nations were turning to Judah to feast it in attention and riches. "The Gentiles had long been expected by the Jews to offer gifts to the Messiah when he appeared (Isaiah 9:6)."

It is difficult to say anything on the subject of Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus from the little evidence that is available at the present time. The question has been raised as to just why did Mary and Joseph have to go clear down to Bethlehem, which is even beyond Jerusalem, to be enrolled upon the decree from Caesar Augustus. The suggestion has been made[#] that there were two places in Palestine by that name, Bethlehem, one of which was in the north near Nazareth, but was of lesser note than the other place near Jerusalem.

* T.J.Thorburn, Op.cit., p.44.

** Ibid., p.53. # Ibid., p.89.

This adds heavy weight for rejecting the Bethlehem of tradition in favor of the place in Galilee which was the logical place for Mary and Joseph to be enrolled because of its geographical proximity to their home in Nazareth. But against this one must balance the thought in Luke's narrative that they went up to the southern Bethlehem, in Judaea, because Joseph was a descendant of David, a resident of Judaea, and would therefore have to be enrolled in the place of his ancestral nativity.

The idea that Christ rose from the dead has stood for the centuries since as the heart of Christian religion, and the idea has come from the evidence in all four Gospels that the tomb was empty, and from the narratives of Matthew and Luke that he re-appeared after the resurrection. The problem for the church school concerns the use it shall make of the entire question of the Resurrection. "Of late years the traditional view as to what may be called the method of his Resurrection has been widely challenged."* The narratives are admittedly neither clear nor consistent, and are unanimous at only one point, the empty tomb. Variation occurs in the details of the discovery, but it was clear

* R.H.Malden, Problems of the New Testament To-day, p.241.

to the discoverers as it is to us that his body had disappeared. The actual resurrection is assumed from this evidence, but not described. No one witnessed it, and only in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, a late compilation, can be found a fantastic description of the coming forth from the tomb, which has been said to be only "worthy of a nursery tale."* Christian education can not overlook the idea of the Resurrection, but in the face of the evidence it must ask the question, "In what sense can Jesus be said to have triumphed over death?"** The decisive proof of his triumph is in his repeated appearances to his disciples after the discovery of the empty tomb. But the question cannot be answered further from the Gospels alone. The more acceptable answer must be found from the message of Paul. "The sum of his testimony is that the bereaved disciples within a very short period after the death of Jesus, obtained the unshakable conviction, by means of these appearances, that he triumphed over death, and that he survived in a spiritual body and was capable of making his existence known to his friends. He says nothing of the finding of the empty tomb, and his

* J.Mackinnon, Op.cit, p.291.

** R.H.Malden, Op.cit., p.243.

reasoning on the rising in a spiritual body seems to preclude this information from the words, 'was buried and hath been raised from there on the third day.'""*

The problem of handling some of the difficulties of the Gospel narratives may well be solved by using the modern interpretations. There is only one thing to remember in using modern interpretations, and it is that they do not in every instance treat the difficulty in the same way, nor arrive at the same conclusion. But they do show one uniformity of conclusion in that one must discriminate between what is essential and what is of subordinate importance. The proper relegation of many debated questions in the Gospels to their place among the non-essentials will prevent the uncertainty attached to them from doing harm. A Christian leader may surely feel that he has every right to induce others to give their allegiance to the things which Jesus himself insisted were vital for all men. Part of the process of helping to establish another in a positive faith is to impart to him one's own deepest convictions, keeping in mind all the while that the essence of Christianity consists in the revelation of God, and of the divine in the human, on the exalted moral and

* J.Mackinnon, Op.cit., p.286.

spiritual plain of the life of Jesus.* As a Christian teacher, it may be profitable to point out to over-anxious minds that disbelief in the Virgin Birth, or in the traditional view of the narratives, or the physical Resurrection, all of which on the evidence are untenable or at least problematic, does not affect the essence of Christianity. In using the modern interpretations it is just as necessary to teach the method of studying the Gospels as it is to teach the message itself. The method is that of open-mindedness in approach, and of seeking for the essentials, in coming to the understanding of Jesus and to a life of fellowship with Christ.

* J.Mackinnon, Op.cit., p.XVII.

Part III, THE PAST AND PRESENT USE OF THE GOSPELS

In the consideration of the use of the Gospels during the past no attempt will be made here to cover a complete history of their use throughout the past. The study at this point will try to investigate some of the influences that have affected the use of the Gospels only in the more recent past, in the last quarter century of years. It will be necessary to introduce an evaluation of some of the source material that has been used in a few of the various series of church school lesson courses, and to examine some of the more recent text-books that attempt to bring a newer presentation of the stories in the Gospels. Finally, there will be made a criticism of such uses that typically represent different approaches made in church schools to the study of the Gospels in the past.

The theory of the verbal inspiration of the Bible has to a large degree influenced the use of the Gospels also. It must be surprising to the modern scholar when he learns that the idea of verbal inspiration is still on the battleline. But recent articles on the subject most assuredly indicate this fact*. It is necessary at

* "The Past, Present, and Future Place of the Bible in Religious Education," by John W. Prince, in Studies in Religious Education, Lotz and Crawford, eds.

this point then to introduce a discussion on its influence upon the use of the Gospels. Progress in the study of the Gospels is seriously retarded and made difficult in the face of this worn-out idea, but so long as there are individuals and groups who still maintain it, scholarship will have to continue its work to overcome the effects of the theory by setting up proof that rests on firm basis to show otherwise. The idea that the Gospels are infallible places a halo about them that is difficult to penetrate. It serves as a handicap for the scholar at the very outset. Verbal inspiration has made little allowance for the treatment of the Gospels in any way but that they are authentic. They are taken to contain the facts and as such are thought of as history, are accepted as being historical and in turn are taught as the history of the life of Jesus.

In such a confined position, very little attention can be devoted to the differences that exist between the four Gospels. The fact is that the Gospels are not to be studied critically at all. There is no room for thought as to the country from which the Gospels came, nor for its people, nor for the conditions of that time, nor for the ideals of those peoples.

Why trouble about the setting, when right here is the Gospel. The question of the language of the Gospels has no place for consideration, much less the literature that was contemporary to that time, or the matter of the canonization of the Gospels with the rest of the Bible. Verbal inspiration never takes into account the very nature of the religious beliefs of those people who are involved in the New Testament, that they were in some respects quite provincial, and in other respects representative of all the religious life of the time. That very superstition which entwined itself about those characters of the New Testament has bound some of the Christians of our past to a belief that the Bible, and in this instance, the Gospels, are the pure Word of God, and within their entanglement the Gospels must be accepted in their full value only as found in the Bible along side the rest of their sacred literature. Within such confinement there is but little place and opportunity to use formal study with its critical and comparative aspects. It is hopeful to learn, however, that the theory of verbal inspiration has lost ground rapidly. In modern scholarship it is no longer of importance as an impediment to further study. Many, perhaps most, Christians have

come to see the fallacy of the theory, and its advocates will be found only among the conservative of conservatists. But for the study here it is important to trace its effects in the methods and materials that have been used for years in the church schools and are still used to a surprisingly large degree.

The catechetical method, together with the material it uses, offers the best illustration of the influence of the idea that the Gospels are the direct word of God. The method is still in use in the instruction of such churches who have come from central European sources. It represents the earliest form of instruction for younger Christians since the Reformation. It is found to be used in both branches of the Protestant Church, Lutheran and Calvinist, but it has and still receives the greatest amount of emphasis in the Lutheran churches. The typical procedure in the catechetical method has been to instruct the children and youth who are growing up into a Christian life, in the belief of a Christian life, and in the case of the particular church, in the beliefs of that church. The instruction is literally filled with proof-texts which are taken out of the Gospels, also from other parts of the Bible, to substantiate those beliefs. The Scripture is used in small segments

to prove sectarian dogma. Now it is not the purpose of this paper to criticize sectarian dogma, but an objection must be raised when it comes to using the Gospels in this manner. The fact that they are used to prove something credits them with a place of infallibility which they do no longer have. Emphasis is placed on belief rather than on a study of why there should be such a belief, with the result that the pupil will have a beautiful system of doctrine, but a limited knowledge of the Bible.

The catechetical method may be helpful in the matter of training for Church membership, rather, in the training of Church dogma, but to the modern use of the Gospels it has little to contribute. Its presentation is wholly inadequate, perhaps the worst of all uses if it is left to stand alone. The treatment that it gives the Gospels is unfair because it picks out only certain passages that fit into the scheme of beliefs, and leaves the remaining passages untouched, or to the discretion of the pupil as he may wish to continue his study alone. To say the least, the method is fundamentally wrong because anything can be proved by texts. Above all else, the use of individual texts only places those texts in greater danger when they have been taken out of the trend of the story within the Gospel.

Faint traces of the proof-text procedure may be seen in the Bible-centered curriculum of the past.* This material has enjoyed much popularity and wide use in the church school until over a decade ago, when its replacement began. This was the International Uniform Lesson material that was in use in the majority of the Sunday church schools of the Protestants in America. It represented the fruit of a coöperative enterprise which involved years of study and preparation before it finally found its way into the church school. A scripture passage formed the center of the lesson, and it was completed by an explanation of the content together with an application to life at present. The whole series of lessons were planned to give a complete approach to training in Christian religion, with the result that selections were made in an orderly way from all parts of the Bible. If the pupil stayed with the lesson, and followed the lessons through the entire series, which required several years for its completion, he would have a comparatively thorough introduction to the Bible, but would not have completed the study of any one particular part. In this system, which had as aims to treat upon parts of the Bible and to

* This material is widely used at present in schools that are not keeping themselves up to the later and more improved material.

teach Christianity, the other parts of the Bible receive just as much emphasis as do the four Gospels. This gives some indication as to the small place given over to the study of the stories in the Gospels, in a school where Christian training has been emphasized, a training the heart of which is to be found in the Gospels. The procedure has been better indeed than that in the catechetical method, but it has been given over too much to the study of religion in general, and to the study of ethics, rather than to the study of Jesus as he may be seen in the Gospels. It has limited the understanding of Jesus to a few selected stories and incidents as they were taken from the various Gospels.

Educators in Christian religion believe that great progress forward was obtained when much of the Uniform Lesson material was replaced by the closely graded church school courses.* The emphasis in this newer curriculum passes from the use of the Bible as the center of study, to the training of the pupil himself in preparation for a religious life. It makes outstanding use of the life situations that surround the pupil, and prepares him to meet them in the light of the known Christian ways. The curriculum which the church school uses for this purpose

* Completely Graded Series, published by Scribner's, and the International Graded Series, by the Graded Press, also the Graded Lessons published by denominational houses.

definitely centers itself about the life of the individual in his present position, and it grades itself to the differing levels of the pupil's understanding. It gives due consideration to their needs and their abilities, and fosters in them the ability to satisfy their desires along Christian ways, and to set up suitable ideals that are worthy of any Christian person. There are two objections to the use that this system of material makes of the Bible in general and of the stories of the Gospels in particular. In the first place there is its rather vague plan of studying the Biblical account of the Christian way of living. It has the rather remote plan of patterning after Christ. The definite problem for the pupil is his own situation, and it seemingly can be solved with the lesser emphasis on the gospel-story. The whole Bible becomes little more than a reference encyclopedia, and when the pupil discovers his particular situation, he is referred, in solving his own problem, to a similar situation that Jesus had to confront. The plan is remote in that it places only secondary emphasis on the study of Jesus' way. In the study of the situation but little time remains to a study in the Gospel, with the result that the story of Jesus' way stands only in the faded background.

The second objection is the more important of the two. It grows out of the first in that the small amount of study actually made in the Gospels, and the indirect way of using them, affords but little opportunity for the pupil to become acquainted with the more modern interpretations made of the confusing stories of the Gospels, in particular, of the Virgin Birth, the Miracles, and the Resurrection. He is referred to a guide which he does not understand. He is engrossed in the discovery of his own situation, and has but little occasion to refer to the fundamental guide for help. The result is the neglect of the story from the Gospel that might help him, and he goes on into life with an unsettled view about such helpful information as might have been given him through a more systematic study of the life of Jesus. He goes on in life with a worn-out idea of some of the gospel-stories, and may even overthrow what little contact he did have with the Scriptures because of his misconceptions. The Graded series are inadequate for teaching the message of the four Gospels, especially with respect to their newer interpretations.*

* Course IX, age 14, on The Life and Teachings of Jesus.

A brief examination of the course material in the Christian Nurture Series* may reveal to one's surprise an approximation of a much better approach to a more satisfactory use of the Gospels in the church school. It devotes an entire course (from a total of ten) to the study of "The Life of Our Lord," and the study continues for a whole year among children twelve years of age. The lessons aim to kindle a desire to follow Christ, to become His disciples, and in this relationship to find the solution for the pupil's life problems. The procedure is opposite that to be found in the closely graded lessons in that it begins each lesson with a study of Jesus and leads the pupil to accept His way and become a follower, and only then to come to the solution of his own problems. The studies are arranged to give a systematic presentation of the life of Christ. Each study is founded in one or more passages of the Gospels, more where the story has parallels in the various Gospels, so that the whole of the Gospels are fairly well covered at the completion of the course. The purpose of the course is to "present the life of Jesus from a devotional standpoint and in such a manner that the result may be a definite portrait, so real and

* Published by Morehouse Publishing Co., Milwaukee, Wis.

vital that it will stir the imagination of the pupil and arouse within him a personal admiration and love."* This presentation comes the nearest of any of the several to give an adequate place to the study of the Gospels in the church school curriculum. But a word needs to be said here about its use of the newer interpretations. The lesson outlines do not include them, but they do leave room for them, which cannot be found in the other lesson courses. In fact, they afford excellent opportunity to use the new interpretations because they contain lessons on the very subjects which are involved. It must be remembered, however, that the very presence of such opportunities lends itself to the use of other interpretations as well. The use to which the lessons may be put depends very much on the beliefs of the teacher using them. If he desires to follow the results of modern scholarship he most certainly may do so. If there were room for an objection to these lessons, it might be made in this fact, that the material was written for use in a church denomination that does not go in too much for using the modern interpretations, and it leans, consequently, just a little against the use of them. Another weakness lies in the fact that the course was

* Christian Nurture Series, Course 7, p.XIII.

prepared for twelve year old children, an age that may be somewhat young yet for a complete study of the life of Christ without earlier training in the subject.

Finally, there may be some danger in having just one course on this important subject. In a school of Christian education that evolves from the peculiar life of one individual it seems that a greater portion of time should be devoted to the study of that individual than is devoted to it in even this lesson course.

There is still another group of studies which make use of the Gospels for their basis, but these studies vary widely in the use they make of modern interpretations. The group consists of such text-books as have been written to reveal the life of Jesus. The more simple of the texts are completely based on the gospel-story, and very little thought is given to controversial passages. The most simple and elementary of these is The Little Boy of Nazareth,* by Edna Madison Bosner, written for children in the Junior Department of the school, which includes ages 10 to 12. The treatment is limited, however, to the study of the boyhood of Jesus. If used by itself it will be found very confining, but if it is used as a forerunner for a more extensive study

* Richard R. Smith Co., 1930.

of Jesus it may be made to serve at its best. There are three good texts for use by children of Junior high school age, ages 13 to 15, that cover a simple but thorough presentation of the life of Jesus. Two of them, The Life and Times of Jesus,* by Frederick C. Grant, and The Life of Jesus for Junior High School Pupils,** by James Bradford McKendry, are quite clear, suggestive and complete in their study of Jesus, but in their simple presentation they have not touched upon any of the newer interpretations. The third text for this age does reach a more expansive state, Project Lessons on the Gospel of Mark,# by Nellie Content Kimberly Wadhams, but as may be noticed in the title it takes up the study only through one of the Gospels. The extensive use it makes of the project principle gives ample opportunity to expand as far as the leader might wish, if his own knowledge and experience enables him to introduce elements of the newer thought. The text lends itself very well to this expansion, especially since it definitely takes up the study of the historical and cultural background of the people of the New Testament times.

* Abingdon Press, 1921.
Century Co., 1925.

** Judson Press, 1928.

An old book put into clean new garments is The Life of Christ,* by Isaac B. Burgess. The author adapted his presentation from the earlier Life of Christ by Burton and Matthews, and so has added some of the newer interpretations to the presentation of these two men. It is a well known presentation that has long been used by students of high-school age and over. It has always been distinguished by the close study it requires of the Bible itself, since it does not substitute for the pupil's study a paraphrase, as is done in the other texts. The whole history of Jesus is surveyed, but simplification is achieved by the use of only the strictly historical Gospels. The study is definitely based on the American Translation of the New Testament, by Edgar J. Goodspeed. The beauty of using this text is that it affords a true solid basis for the study of all the Gospels through its emphasis on the strictly historical elements. It shows a step in advancement in the use of modern interpretations.

It may be noticed from this rapid glance at these curricula materials that each course of study has its own peculiar treatment of the material in the Gospels. No general statement can be made concerning the use of the Gospels during the past. But as the existing curricula

* University of Chicago Press, 1930.

are examined there are certain tendencies that may be seen to typify each of them. Some of them definitely center themselves about the pupil himself, and proceed from his problems to find the corresponding problems in the Bible, and there is but little place for the study of the problems of interpretation that are within the gospel-story. On the other hand those courses which are definitely Biblical-centered are so encumbered by the study of the Bible as a whole that the Gospels receive only a portion of the attention that is shared for the study of the whole book. A cross-cut section of most procedures in use in the church schools to-day indicates at the most only a patch-work study of the Gospels. The understanding of Jesus is limited to a few selected stories and incidents, and a vast amount of material which is otherwise helpful has been omitted. Included in this is the study of some of the modern interpretations, not only through modern translations, but also through a more extensive study of the historic times of Jesus, together with an emphasis upon the culture of the people of Jesus' day. To get the completion of all this it is necessary to depart in some instances from the sole use of the Gospels.

There is a danger that must be indicated here and it has to do with the use of such books that have presented the life of Jesus as may be gathered from the Gospels. Some of them attempt to give a complete story of the life of Jesus, with the result that the accounts are harmonized to the destruction of historical fact. The story may become distorted too easily in the effort to obtain harmony, and there are certain values that surely will be sacrificed when the complete story is gathered, in part here, and then in part there. The procedure does not permit the recognition of comparative values, nor take into account the differences in parallel passages. Unless the complete story has been written with the positive aim to maintain all the historical facts, one should hesitate in using that course. Every effort must be made to be fair to the intelligent child and give him the truth in the Gospels as well as the Gospel truth, and this cannot be secured short of leading him entirely through all of the Gospels in the light of all the known facts that affect the understanding of the life and teachings of Jesus. The degree to which this principle is practiced will depend of course on the age level and on the intelligence level of the children who are studying the four Gospels.

For young people and adults who are able to make an independent study of the Gospels in the light of modern interpretation, a somewhat helpful guide may be had in the recent volume, A Life of Jesus,* by Basil Mathews. This presentation contains the story of Jesus as seen from sources that include all of the Gospels, and yet is all the while fair to each one by closely maintaining historical fact. In such cases where there has been considerable question as to the historicity and therefore of the accuracy of the material, the author has placed amplifying notes to the story to speak of the sources and the disputes that arise from the doubtful content. The book is purely biographical as well as historical in its presentation, written in a vivid style that runs true to the very life of Jesus. It places the story of Jesus' life in the setting of the time to the extent that there is adequate knowledge of the setting from sources including more than just the information from the Gospels. Though it has employed the method of the scholars and has included their results to make the story convincing in every detail, it also shows an astonishing clarity and is as fascinating as a good novel, thoroughly alive and real. There are few better studies than this for use in a college group, or to be placed in the hands of an earnest student who is willing to read this biography as he would

* Published by Richard R. Smith, 1931.

any other biography. The volume has every suggestion of what use can be made to-day of modern interpretations, and it certainly shows a marked improvement over the kind of curricula that has been mauled over in the church school classes during the past.

The student who is still further interested must be directed to works that are still more extensive, but follow the methods of scientific study in their approach. There are numerous volumes that give the life and teachings of Jesus, none of which follow the identical line of thought, but do give much for study. The policy may be suggested here to use two or more selected lives of Christ to give a comparison in portrait by different writers. One good volume to follow this way is that of Edward Increase Bosworth, The Life and Teachings of Jesus,* which takes up the matter of sources for the Gospels, the setting of the Gospels, and then a study of Jesus' life with particular emphasis on his teachings. Hand in hand with this book one could use with value The Historical Life of Christ,** by J. Warschauer, which does not at all parallel Professor Bosworth's book, but does give a stimulating presentation of the life and work of Jesus, and every student in the study of the life of Christ could profitably use it in following the approach of modern interpretations.

* Macmillan Co., 1924.

** Macmillan Co., 1926.

Part IV, THE USE OF MODERN INTERPRETATIONS

Primary in importance to the problem of what is the modern interpretation of the Gospels stands the problem of what use the church school shall make of that modern interpretation. The issue revolves about this question, "How shall Religious Education deal with the changed views?" During the past and to a large degree in the present, the Gospels have been used only as a part of the integral study of the whole Bible, and have not received the specific emphasis and attention one would expect in a religion that is based primarily on the message they contain. A very small portion of the church school curricula is devoted to the gospel-story, which gives one the impression of their small importance. This is not the only inadequacy of the present use of the Gospels. A greater weakness in the present system lies in the attitude in which the stories are still being treated. Such stories which should be presented admittedly as fantastic, allegorical, and illustrative, are still being given to the imaginative child as the Great Truth, instead of being handled for what they really are. The children are taught false impressions, and they will have to change their ideas when they get

older, unless the troublesome impressions are not allowed to stand in the way of a knowledge of Christ that is lasting. There is much in the miracles that attracts the child of eight, nine, and ten years of age because of his highly developed sense of imagination, and the stories of them should not be denied him any more than one would deny him a story of the Arabian Nights because it was fabulous. But such stories from the Gospels which may lead astray at a later time must be clothed in a peculiar kind of garment that can be changed, or at least cleaned afresh sometime later when it no longer serves in its original use. That is what happens in the instance of the mythical stories which the child reads and thrives on mentally, until he must re-adjust the story to his advanced thinking at a later date. Nothing should be taught which later has to be unlearned.

There is indeed room for questioning the place of modern interpretations for use with church school children of the elementary grades. A brief examination of what modern interpretation has done and is still doing leads one to feel that its content is for a much more mature mind. There certainly is no question about

its use with adults and with students of Biblical interpretation whose minds are developed enough to visualize the thought as a whole and are able to discern the differences and weigh them for their worth. But the question of real importance relates to meeting the problem of using the modern interpretations in teaching such younger people whose minds are not yet equipped for critical interpretation.

In dealing with the problem relative to the entire church school situation the following possible ways are suggestive of what might be done in the way of making more extensive use of the modern interpretation of the Gospels: The traditional idea of the inspiration of the Bible can be re-clothed with the same idea of the inspiration of other literature since Bible times. The tension of the thought of a God-given Book will thus be eased by the more elastic idea of a book that came into being through a process of development. The differing ideas of God may be understood the better also through the idea of a developing conception of God. The place of the Gospels will be near the climax of the development since they contain the direction to God that is given by Jesus. The old idea of the infallibility of the Bible

must pass if any use is to be made at all of the modern interpretations, regardless of what the interpretation may prove to be.

Secondly, it might be well to revise the Bible in the light of modern interpretation, not only of the Gospels, but of the entire book. This would involve the tremendous problem of disposing of the old versions and substituting the new one, should the revision prove acceptable. To a limited degree the Holy Bible has been revised, and re-translated in a number of ways, all of which is extremely helpful. But one might raise the advisability of revision to the extent of omitting troublesome and unrelated passages. Upon further thought this is not entirely necessary if provision is made for a better understanding of the Bible as the result of current methods of study.

A third way that will prove quite helpful may be found in guiding the pupils to avoid such stories that may prove troublesome in their present understanding. This way requires the close supervision of all Bible reading which the pupils may do, both in school and at home or elsewhere. Because of this requirement this way may become very confining, and almost impossible unless there is complete coöperation from the home.

Furthermore, it is not so desirable because of complications that may arise later when the child makes further study of his Bible upon his own initiative, unless he has been thoroughly prepared to study such stories which were earlier omitted.

The fourth way indicates a swing of the pendulum to the other extreme in the attempt to teach the children all the facts about the Gospel narratives. This may be the desire for ultimate accomplishment in the teaching program, but for immediate use there is much room for questioning the advisability of the procedure. The time element does not permit such an extensiveness. It involves a certain amount of dogmatism in teaching, which the church school cannot afford. To give the facts in every Bible message would destroy most of the factors that grasp the child's imaginative interests, and before long he would acquire the feeling of saturation from over-stuffed sacred literature that might turn him away entirely from Christianity.

A fifth way that has greater indications of its practicability includes the elimination of part of the present curricula to make more ample room for the teaching of Gospel material. Roughly speaking there is only slightly more than approximately a tenth of the present

curricula that is devoted to studies based on the Gospels. If the heart of Christianity is to be found in the message of the Gospels surely they are worth a more thorough study than is now being devoted to them. One should think that at least a fourth of all curricula could be based on the Gospels, another fourth on the remainder of the New Testament, and the balance based on the Old Testament and other material that leads to a discovery of God. This apportionment would permit more ample opportunity to make a presentation of the Gospels according to the modern interpretation.

Modern interpretation has been arrived at through the pathway of a scientific approach. Can the same method be adopted in the church school? Certainly the church school ought to be scientific in its methods just as are other educational institutions. But the degree of intensity which its adoption involves may prove a larger task than it shows on the surface. The church school specializes in religion, but not to the extent that is required in the instance of a scientific approach. Neither the available time, nor the pupil's understanding permit Christian education in the church school to follow procedures which belong to the field of specialization. However, in classes for young people who are mature

enough in their intellect to follow scientific methods, one might well take up the study of the Gospels according to such procedures that bear a close resemblance to a scientific approach.

A seventh way to make use of the modern interpretation of the Gospels is through teacher training. This is perhaps the first step toward adopting the more scientific approach. Most untrained teachers are not versed in religious thought current to the present time, and thus are not fully acquainted with the content of the Gospel material nor with the methods of sharing it with their pupils. Training is the task of the local church, if it is able to provide training in its program, otherwise training must be carried on in community agencies, or even in specialized schools for that purpose. The nature of training need not be limited to methods alone, but it should provide the larger space to content material, to the study of curricula in the narrower sense of the term, and, more limited yet, to the study of the life of Christ as it is now seen through modern interpretation. The burden of the problem rests directly on the teachers who are engaged in presenting the message of the Gospels. Their equipment must include these five things: a knowledge of the Gospels, the modern

interpretation of the Gospels, newer trends in New Testament thought, and finally, an understanding sympathy for the children, and especially for the youth who are involved in coming to a discovery of God through Christ. The teacher's experience in Christian living can be best enriched through his re-study of the Christ whom he is to portray, and then if he has the position of his pupil thoroughly in mind, he is ready to lead his class to a discovery of God through Christ.

The eighth pathway is that of scholarliness upon the part of each individual in the church school, teacher and pupils. This implies the impression of the spirit of open-mindedness to every problem that arises, and requires the fair examination of every problem to discern its fundamental nature and its contribution to the understanding of Jesus. For this way, the Gospels are never closed in the truth which they reveal, but they always stand open to all to be ever studied and criticized in the light of the knowledge of the present time. Furthermore, there is an allowance of flexibility that enables the pupil to study his problem when it appears. Rather than postpone the problem, in this procedure it may be studied and solved, to make room for an increased knowledge of Christ by further study.

In connection with this last pathway, a direct effort might be made possible by definitely offering a course to the more advanced pupils on New Testament Interpretation, with special emphasis on the criticism of the Gospel narratives. There are plenty texts and other course materials, some of which have been named already, that will prove helpful for study. Many of the other plans here suggested can be incorporated in this particular course, to make available the fruits of modern scholarship in the study of the Gospels.

The tenth and last suggestion is for the provision of still another course in the church school curriculum. It is a course on the Historical Background of the New Testament which would provide a setting for the Gospels, and enable one to understand them according to that setting. This course too would be meant for the more advanced pupils, to use upon the completion of such other curricula that are regularly provided. Both of these courses, one on Interpretation and the other on Background, would happily complete an education in Christianity in which one of the objectives was to come to an understanding of God through Christ. With the use of them one would not need to re-organize the already existing curricula, but could amply provide the missing material by supplementation.

Certainly Modern Interpretation of the Gospels has something important to contribute to the work of the church school of to-day. When its nature and content have once been discovered, it will be found helpful indeed in making new and clear the message concerning Jesus Christ. The very nature of public school education requires the church school to adopt Modern Interpretation and make every possible use of it in its program for wide-awake children and youth. But before it can be put into use, every Christian leader and teacher must first thoroughly acquaint himself with the methods and the messages which are involved. Only then can he attempt to engage in the process of building a constructive and permanent approach to God through Christ, an approach by which his pupils and followers can safely cross too to an understanding of God. The use he makes of the modern interpretation of the Gospels involves his knowledge of the Gospels, his own Christian experience, the teaching technique which enables him to share it with his pupils, and to lead them to discover it for themselves, together with the present experience in Christianity and knowledge of Christ which his pupils hold. The ultimate end in the use of the modern interpretations is for the purpose of leading children and youth into an intimate and

lasting experience of Jesus as a friend, as a guide in life, and as a guide to a personal experience and fellowship with God, an experience and fellowship that can be modified and changed, but can never be destroyed.

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